

THE ANNUAL OF CINEMA & TELEVISION FANTASY

STARBURST

CLASSICS
OF THE
HORROR FILM





Editor: John Barracough
Writer: Alan Murdoch
Design: Steve O'Leary & Rahid Khen
Art assistance: Richard Vaughn
Editorial consultant: Alan McKenzie

Classics of the Horror Film



Introduction

"Classics of the Horror Film" is a title that needs some explanation. What makes a "classic"? Indeed, what makes a "horror film"? The latter term is perhaps the easiest to define. A horror film is a movie that deliberately sets out to frighten or repel its audience. Simple as that. That means that a scary movie is a horror film, regardless of the setting it's told against. *Jaws* is a horror picture. More so when one realises just how much it owes to Jack Arnold's 1954 movie *Creature from the Black Lagoon*. This theory can be taken a step further and one could claim that the recent *Scum* is a horror film in that it is the terrifying story of what life in a boys Borstal is like. But that could be taking the theory just one step too far.

The term classic is just a little harder to pin down. A classic is probably best defined as a movie that initiates a trend or as a film that takes an established situation and does it better than it's ever been done before. Thus the inclusion of *Curse of Frankenstein* (1956) in this book is more because of the trend that it set rather than for any intrinsic excellence in the picture. On the other hand *Bride of Frankenstein* is covered in this book because it took the established ideas of the earlier *Frankenstein* movie (1931) and simply did a better job.

I make no excuse for the fact that all the films I look at in this *Starburst Annual* are either personal favourites or films that I feel began trends. I make no apologies for my dislike of the Hammer series of horror pictures, nor for my criticism of the talents of Terence Fisher. That readers will disagree with some of my views I have





no doubt. In fact I welcome the opinions of the readers on some of the potentially controversial statements in this extended essay.

I make no secrets of my preferences for the Val Lewton school of movie-making. I think Lewton's style has yet to be bettered by contemporary film-makers. Yet at the same time, I acknowledge the merits of Tobe Hooper's *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*.

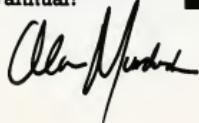
The most frustrating part about writing this book was that I just didn't have the space to devote to films that deserved books all to themselves. Perhaps one day someone will let me produce a 1000 page tome on the subject or horror films.

Though even then, it probably wouldn't be space enough.

Finally, I must make mention of the other talented people who were involved in the production of this book. I extend my gratitude to editor John Barraclough a great fan of horror films himself, who supplied stills from his personal collection and who gave me the go-ahead on what might have seemed to some people just a personal whim. I'd like to thank long-time *Starburst* colleague Phil Edwards for supplying posters and stills and for reading over the copy and toning down some of my wilder theories. I thank designer Steve O'Leary and his art assistant Richard

Vaughn for all the hard work they put into making this annual a visual delight. Special mention must go to Britain's top fantasy artist John Bolton for his superb cover and to Grandreams for producing the project in the first place.

Right, fellas. What are we doing for next year's annual? ■

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan Murchison".

POSTER GALLERY

* NO ONE ... BUT NO ONE ... WILL BE
ADMITTED TO THE THEATRE AFTER THE
START OF EACH PERFORMANCE OF

ALFRED
HITCHCOCK'S

PSYCHO

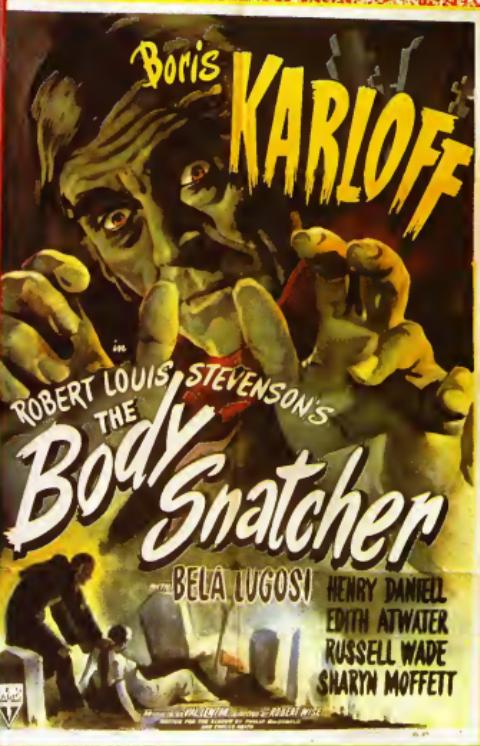
STARRING

ANTHONY PERKINS · MILES MILES GAVIN

CERT X

and JANET LEIGH as MARION CRANE

* Alfred Hitchcock



STRANGE,
FORBIDDING,
THRILLING—

THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE

WEIRD
EERIE

as
anything
you've
seen!

BORIS
KARLOFF • BELA
LUGOSI
**The VANISHING
BODY**
with DAVID MANNERS • JACQUELINE WELLS

Produced by



Simone Kent Jane
SIMON • SMITH • RANDOLPH
ANN CARTER • ELIZABETH RUSSELL • EYE MARCH
JULIA DEAN • ENFORD GAGE • SIR LANCELOT
Produced by
Directed by
GUNTHER V. FRITSCH and ROBERT WISE
Screen play by ERNST KOCHEN

YOU
MAY
NOT
BELIEVE
IN
GHOSTS
BUT
YOU
CANNOT
DENY
TERROR!

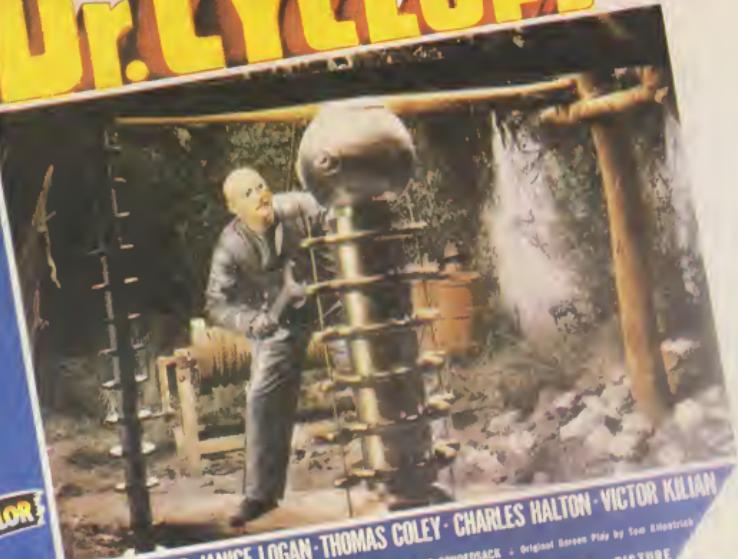
METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER
ROBERT WISE PRODUCTION

THE HAUNTING

STARRING
JULIE HARRIS · CLAIRE BLOOM · RICHARD JOHNSON · RUSS TAMBLYN

ROBERT WISE · NELSON SINGING

Dr. CYCLOPS



TECHNICOLOR

ALBERT DEKKER · JANICE LOGAN · THOMAS COLEY · CHARLES HALTON · VICTOR KILIAN
FRANK YACONELLI · DIRECTED BY ERNEST SCHORECK · Original Screen Play by Tom Killion
A PARAMOUNT PICTURE

A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN BY DAY - A LUSTING QUEEN WASP BY NIGHT.

The WASP WOMAN



SUSAN CABOT · FRED EISLEY
BARBOURA MORRIS
Directed by ROBERT LOUIS MINTON
Written by ROBERT LOUIS MINTON
Produced by ROBERT LOUIS MINTON
Cinematography by ROBERT LOUIS MINTON

A
STRANGE
NEW
EXPERIENCE
IN

Shock

DEBORAH KERR

the
Innocents

JACK CLATTON

as himself

LIAM ARCHIBALD

TRUMAN C

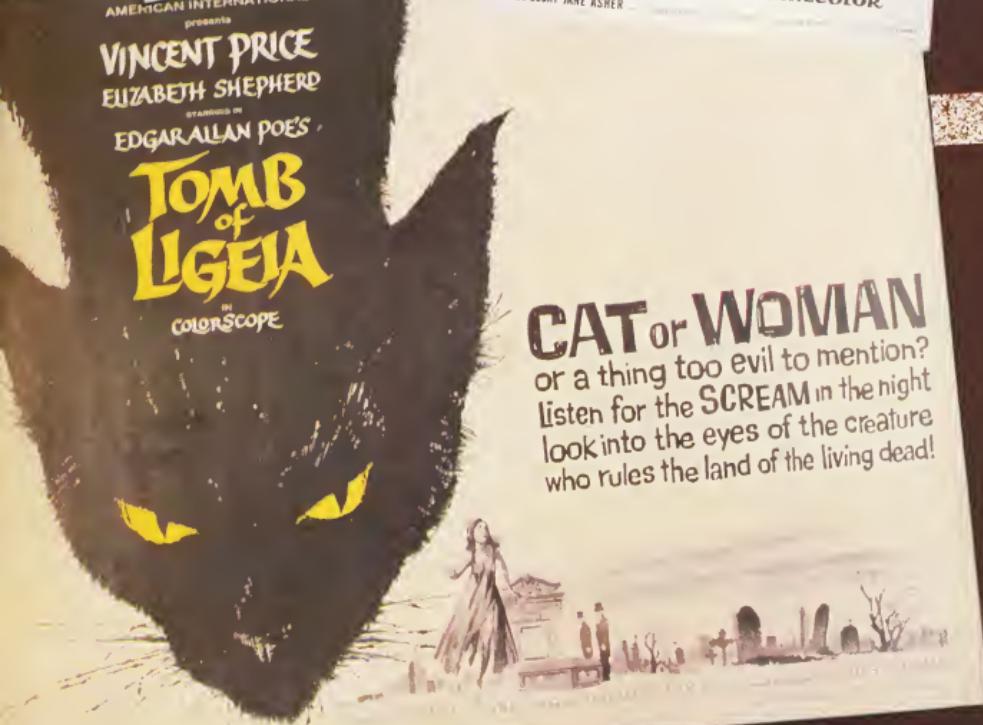
HENRY JAMES

CORBAN

CINEMASCOPE



Upper Left: Life Pictures



From the depths of the sea...
A TIDAL WAVE
OF TERROR!

ATTACK OF THE CRAB MONSTER

Produced by
GARLAND · DUNCAN · JOHNSON
A Roger Corman Production
Directed by ROGER CORMAN · An ALLIED ARTISTS
Production

£10,000
IF

By the all-time master
of HORROR!

Edgar Allan Poe

THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM

PINAVISION
TECHNICOLOR

VINCENT PRICE
KATHLEEN BARBARA

CERT X

"Down and still do-

WENN IN DER HÖLLE KEIN PLATZ MEHR IST
KOMMEN DIE TOTEN AUF DIE ERDE ZURÜCK

ZOMBIE



ZOMBIE - STARRING
ROBERT MONTGOMERY, ROBERT REED,
DOLores DEL RIO, AND GENE MARX
Directed and Produced by ROGER CORMAN
Produced by ROBERT MONTGOMERY
and ROGER CORMAN
Cinematography by ROBERT MONTGOMERY

YOU DIE OF FRIGHT!

THE FIRST PERSON WHO DIES OF FRIGHT WHILE
SEEING THIS FILM IS INSURED FOR £10,000



DANA ANRENDS
PEGGY CUMMING
and NIALL MacGINNIS

Night of the Demon

Screenplay by CHARLES BENNETT and HAL E. CHESTER
Based on the Story "Casting the Bones" by Montague R. JAMES
Illustrated by JACQUES TOUREUR • Produced by FRANK BEVIS

CERT X
ADULTS ONLY

Executive Producer HAL E. CHESTER
A SABRE FILM PRODUCTION

Chosen...singled out
to die...victim of
his imagination or
victim of a demon?





can you survive



The Texas Chain Saw Massacre

X (LONDON)

...it happened!

CAUTION

There are scenes in this film
that may be disturbing to
some members of the public

Starring!
Spectacular!

3-DIMENSION

THRILLS THAT CAN ALMOST TOUCH YOU!



IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE

Starring
RICHARD
CARLSON

BARBARA
RUSH

CHARLES DRAKE
RUSSELL JOHNSON
KATHLEEN HUGHES
JOE SAWYER

Produced by JAMES LORBER
Directed by ROBERT ZEMMER
Story by RAY BRADBURY
Presented by WILLIAM ALLEN
A UNIVERSAL PICTURES FILM



83 351 3D

The Thirties - Part One



Few fans of the horror movies would argue that the thirties spawned the entire genre. From Tod Browning's *Dracula* in 1931 to the close of play in 1939 with *The Son of Frankenstein*, the thirties horror films were of a consistently high standard. Certainly, their techniques were crude when compared to the glossier movies of the forties, but somehow the thirties films seemed more enthusiastic in their approach and more stylish in their realisation.

The first of the great thirties horror offerings, *Dracula* (1931), was based on Bram Stoker's classic novel of 1897. Stoker himself had been aware of the story's dramatic possibilities and had secured the theatrical copyright by giving a reading of his novel at the Lyceum Theatre in London on 18th May 1897. It was a shrewd move. Twenty five years later his widow would bring the full might of British justice to bear on the makers of the 1922 vampire movie, *Nosferatu*, claiming infringement of copyright. Mrs Stoker won her case and all prints of the film were ordered to be destroyed. Happily for film historians, copies of the film survived, and in 1980, with the character of Dracula safely in public domain, German director Werner Herzog made an almost shot-for-shot retreading of *Nosferatu*.

Nevertheless, the original *Nosferatu* was not without influence. The impact of the film had been noticed by a young actor/producer called Hamilton Deane. It was *Nosferatu* which inspired him to secure the rights to *Dracula* and stage his own theatrical production of the story in Derby, England in 1924. Deane himself played vampire hunter extraordinaire Van Helsing, while Edmund Blake essayed the role of the vampiric Count. The play was such a rousing success that a second company of players was formed and, with Deane again as Van Helsing and Raymond Huntley as Dracula, the play opened in London on St Valentine's day in 1927. The production was even more successful than its provincial counterpart, so much so that it came to the attention of American theatrical producer Horace Liverright. Liverright

acquired the rights and hired Stateside journalist John L. Balderstone to Americanise the play for Broadway presentation. On 27th September it opened in New York's Fulton Theatre with a Hungarian actor, Bela Lugosi, in the title role. It was around this time that sound came to the movies!

Whatever possessed a big studio like Universal to part with \$40,000 for the screenrights to a play whose subject matter bordered on perverse for the time can only now be a matter of conjecture. It is likely that the director who was chosen to helm the project, Tod Browning, had something to do with the decision. Browning had earlier affairs with the horror genre, notably the Lon Chaney Sr. vehicle *London After Midnight* (1927). And it was certainly no secret that Browning desired the services of Chaney for the *Dracula* project. Tragically, Chaney died of throat cancer on 26th August 1930, just over a month before filming was due to start on *Dracula*. The studio executives considered several actors for the lead role in the film. William Courtney, Ian Keith and Victor Jory were all names mentioned around the Universal boardroom table. Finally, Lugosi was given a screen test, and the role his, began work on 29th September 1930.

The Deane/Balderstone play was adapted for the screen by Dudley Murphy and Garrett Ford though, judging from Browning's reputation, it is almost certain that the director did a little re-writing of his own. The production was photographed with panache by German import Karl Freund, who went on to establish a name for himself as a director as well. And, at the same time as Browning's version was being shot, the standing sets were utilised by an enterprising Universal to film a Spanish language *Dracula* film, with George Melford directing and Carlos Villarias in the title role, though that fact is little remembered today.

However successful the 1931 *Dracula* movie was, both in the year it was released and in the later double bill reissue with *Frankenstein*, the intervening years have not been kind to

it. Viewed today, *Dracula* betrays its theatrical origins. Browning's sparing use of incidental music and long pauses during conversations give the production a very stagey feel. And in

some ways, *Dracula* is constructed far more like a silent film to which a soundtrack has been added than as a true talkie. But Universal's next foray into the world of gothic horror would

Below: A posed publicity still for Tod Browning's production of Dracula.



Below: Dr Van Helsing (Edward Van Sloan) and The Count (Bela Lugosi). Bottom: A publicity portrait of Lugosi as The Count. Right: Boris Karloff as the Monster in James Whale's 1931 classic Frankenstein.



sidestep these pitfalls.

Having successfully created a public thirst for horror, Universal needed another property with which to keep that thirst alive. The natural candidate for this was a film version of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein*, *The Modern Prometheus*. Naturally, Universal would cast Bela Lugosi, the star of *Dracula*. Lugosi made some screen tests with his Dracula co-star Edward Van Sloan and Film Weekly (25th July 1931) talked about "Bela Lugosi, who will play the leading role in *Frankenstein*". In the meantime, Lugosi had been doing a little thinking. He was top of the Universal heap. He could pick and choose his projects. And he didn't think that *Frankenstein* would do him any favours. He didn't like the idea of acting under all that makeup. His fans wouldn't even recognise him. And the thought of a film role with no dialogue

displeased him. Lugosi rejected the role of the *Frankenstein* Monster. Universal had no choice. It shelved the production. And the production stayed on the shelf until the arrival of English director James Whale in Hollywood.

Whale was signed to a contract by Universal and, as is the prerogative of a newly-signed, prestigious director like Whale, was given a free hand in the selection of his first project for the company. Whale chose *Frankenstein* and cast his fellow Englishman Colin Clive in the title role. Universal executive Carl Laemmle announced the following: "Mr Whale is now directing *Frankenstein* at Universal City. When this project was first mooted, it was he who suggested Colin Clive to interpret the part of the monster. Americans have been extremely keen on Colin Clive since his magnificent performance in *Journey's End*, and I thought it would be

a very good thing if he were brought back into films."

The fact that Clive didn't play the part of the Monster in *Frankenstein* tends to make nonsense of Laemmle's announcement. It is likely that Laemmle, like so many moviegoers, made the mistake of confusing the title role of *Frankenstein* with the Monster. But a short time later, *Film Weekly* corrected the misinformation: "At the Universal studios, Boris Karloff, playing the synthetic monster 'made' from fresh corpses in *Frankenstein*, is under oath of secrecy. Once made up he is not allowed to leave the studios or see visitors until the makeup is removed. His journeys to and from his dressing room and the sound-proofed stages are made with a hood over his head and face, and with gloves covering his hands. His meals are served to him in private."



Boris Karloff? Only the most astute film fans would have recognised the name. After bit parts in scores of silent pictures, the gentle voiced British actor had made five talkies: *Graft*, *Five Star Final*, *The Mad Genius*, *The Yellow Ticket* and *Guilty Generation* (all 1931). None of his roles were much above "featuring" in the credits. Then he landed the role that was to make him the proverbial household name. The probably apocryphal Hollywood story would have it thus: James Whale was enjoying a quiet lunch in the Universal canteen, no doubt pondering hard over who he would cast as the monster in *Frankenstein*, when he chanced to lay eyes on Karloff. Whale began to doodle Karloff's face on the tablecloth. Whale has been quoted as saying; "Boris Karloff's face had always fascinated me, and I made drawings of his head, added sharp, bony ridges where I imagined



Left: Before and after. Will the real William Pratt please stand up. Boris Karloff before and after the makeup man Jack Pierce got to work.

the skull might have joined. His physique was weaker than I could wish, but that queer penetrating personality of his, I felt, was more important than his shape, which could easily be altered."

The task of altering Karloff's shape fell partially to Universal makeup wizard, Jack Pierce. Said Pierce: "I did some research in anatomy, surgery, criminology, ancient and modern burial customs and electro-dynamics. I discovered there are six ways a surgeon can cut a skull, and I figured Dr Frankenstein, who was not a practising surgeon, would take the easiest. That is, he would cut the top of the skull off, straight across like a pot lid, hinge it, pop the brain in, and clamp it tight. That's the reason I decided to make the Monster's head square and flat, like a box, and dig that big scar across his forehead, and have metal clamps hold it together. The two metal studs that stick out the sides of his neck are inlets for electricity — plugs! The Monster is an electrical gadget and lightning is his life force."

The forehead clamps made an appearance only in early versions of the makeup. (See illustration). By the time the Monster went before the cameras proper, the clamps had been dispensed with, though the other essential features remained the same.

Except for the eyes!

Karloff felt that the eyes in Pierce's makeup retained too much intelligence for what was a primitive intellect. They had to be dulled in some way. "The Monster was inarticulate," said Karloff. "I had to make him understand. When the audience first sees him he is only five hours old. My first problem was not to let his eyes be too intelligent, which is why I decided to use the false eyelids which half veil the eyes."

Pierce agreed and stuck semi-

circles of rubber over Karloff's own eyelids. The effect was perfect, if less than comfortable. Yet Karloff bore the pain and the inconvenience of the cumbersome makeup with the stoicism of a true professional. It was as if he knew that the discomfort was the temporary price he had to pay to achieve stardom. And achieve stardom he did!

Frankenstein had cost Universal a quarter of a million dollars to make, a fairly large budget at the time, but it was the biggest success of the season. Even the critics liked it. Said *The New York Times*: "No matter what one may say about the melodramatic ideas here, there is no denying that it is far and away the most effective of its kind. Beside it, *Dracula* is tame . . ." *Motion Picture Herald* echoed the sentiments: *Frankenstein* is a thriller, make no mistake . . . Women come out trembling, men exhausted." *The New York Daily News* was only marginally more restrained: "It is heartily interesting and wholly absorbing."

It was *Frankenstein* more than *Dracula* that set the style for the horror pictures of the thirties. Some measure of its success and influence was mirrored in the fact that it kicked off the concept of horror series for Universal, culminating in the last of the straight monster teamup pictures, *House of Dracula* in 1945.

*Below: An early test makeup for Boris Karloff for the 1931 *Frankenstein*. Above right: The Monster lurks in the undergrowth, seeking a suitable victim. Below right: Bela Lugosi as Count Dracula bides you welcome to his home. Opposite: Lugosi as The Count. Inset: Director James Whale and star Boris Karloff on the set of *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935).*





The Thirties - Part Two



Above: Frederic March as the evil half of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

The phenomenal success of *Dracula* (1931) and *Frankenstein* (1931) seemed to open the floodgates for movies investigating the realms of human terror. The stars of each of these pioneering films were launched in spectacular style, though only Karloff would be taken seriously as a box-office attraction by the production companies. There can be no doubt that Lugosi's early career was full of promise, even if his first genre picture after *Dracula* was the less-than-wonderful *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932). A far superior film was *White Zombie* (1932). Lugosi was given a role he could sink his teeth into and looked as though he enjoyed every second of it. Co-producer and director Victor Halperin deliberately set out to recapture the feel and atmosphere of the old silent pictures in his approach to *White Zombie*. The film is full of ominous close-ups of Lugosi's leering face, the eyes usually accentuated with a keylight, and florid, theatrical dialogue. In fact, the first time I saw this film, several years ago on television, I thought the movie teetered dangerously on the brink of unintentional comedy. Nevertheless, Lugosi's performance gives sufficient chills to rank *White Zombie* among the greats of the thirties.

Interestingly, *White Zombie* did establish a movie tradition for the subsequent portrayal of Zombies on the screen. The living dead, under the control of Lugosi's Murder Legendre shamble around the countryside at snail's pace, never managing to achieve a brisk enough gait to appear in the least menacing. This convention has been adhered to slavishly by all subsequent movie zombies. Isn't it about time someone made horror films in which the zombies dart around the country side at breakneck speed? Now, that would be something to be frightened off!

A far more lavish film on every level was Paramount's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1932), directed by Rouben Mamoulian. Paramount executives had wanted actor/director Irving Pichel for

the title character(s), but Mamoulian had other ideas. He felt that while Pichel would make a first class Mr Hyde, his Dr Jekyll would be too rough. The director cast around and finally selected a young actor best known for his light comedy roles. Frederic March. Mamoulian was convinced that March could handle both sides of the character admirably. But what of the transformation between the two? All Mamoulian knew was that he had to film the change in one take with no stop motion effects, a feat he achieved admirably. And for 35 years he kept the secret of the transformation to himself. Then finally, in 1967, he revealed all: "The secret of the transformation of Dr Jekyll into Mr Hyde in one continuous shot — without cuts and without rewinding the film in the camera — lay in the use of coloured transparencies, which gradually revealed more and more of the actor's makeup. As you know, a red filter will absorb red and reveal all other colours, and a green filter will do the reverse. Working on that principal, we held graduating coloured filters one by one before the camera, thus allowing successive portions of March's coloured makeup to register on film. It was all rather primitive — the filters were hand-made — but it worked!"

Having created the visuals for the transformation scene, Mamoulian went to work on the sound that would accompany it. Said Mamoulian in 1969: "A realistic sound in a magical setting is ruinous and similarly a realistic sound while Jekyll is being transformed would have pulled you down into the mire of naturalism. So I decided the sound had to be something special. We photographed light frequencies of varying intensity from a candle. I hit a gong and cut the impact off and ran the sound backwards and to give a pulsing rhythm, I ran up and down a stairway while they recorded my speeded up heartbeats. When I say my heart was in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* I mean that literally."

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde was a

particularly effective addition to the horror genre. So much so that the censor worked overtime, chopping 1,000ft out of the picture. Over 11 minutes of screen time! But the excised portions were not those concerned with the more horrific elements of the story. What the censor objected to far more strongly was the suggestion of a sexual liaison between Hyde and Miriam Hopkins as the cockney hooker. As a result, Hopkins' was left with little more than a cameo role.

Contemporary critics felt that the horror treatment of a literary classic was out of line. Film Weekly condemned the film as "pre horror film stuff" and thought the transformation to be "grossly overdone". But Mamoulian's approach was vindicated when his star Frederic March took the Academy Award for Best Actor for his performance. The horror film had become part of the Hollywood Establishment.

But during this time Karloff had not been idle. He had re-teamed with his Frankenstein director James Whale to produce a film version of J.B. Priestley's novel Benighted. The result, *The Old Dark House* (1932), became the epitome of the "Old House" type of

thriller and provided the Hollywood debuts of British actors Charles Laughton and Raymond Massey. It was also Karloff's first credited starring role. Ernest Thesiger was on top form as Horace Femm, head of the whacky household, who welcomes five stranded travellers into his home and presides over the weird doings.

However, the inclusion of *The Old Dark House* here is debatable. Certainly, Karloff's performance (and makeup) as the mad, dumb butler Morgan could help place the movie within the genre. But in the final analysis, we must categorise James Whale's film as a comedy thriller, creepy at times, hysterically funny at others, but not, strictly, a horror picture.

That accusation could not be levelled at Karl Freund's poetic horror vehicle, *The Mummy* (1932). Again it was Karloff under Jack Pierce's makeup — the first, the shrivelled, undead Mummy and the second, more subtle makeup as Ardet Bey.

At the time, Universal seemed to be reluctant to give Jack Pierce any credit for the monsters he created, though this quote, anonymous but doubtless Pierce, was released with the publicity material on the film: ►

Below: The servants of Murder Legendre (Bela Lugosi) in White Zombie.





Below: Boris Karloff as Ardent Bey in *The Mummy*. Above right: The only glimpse we get of Karloff in his mummy costume from the same movie.



"First the face was dampened and covered with thin straps of cotton. On this, collodion and spirit gum were applied with a small brush. Then the ears were pinned back and an electric drying machine was used to produce the necessary wrinkles. Then the hair was covered with clay, while twenty-two different paints were applied to the features. Finally the whole body was swathed from head to foot in bandages and covered with a thin dusting of Fuller's earth. At the end of the operation Karloff could not move a muscle of his face or utter a single word."

To this the ever modest Karloff added: "I owe my stardom to an uncannily clever makeup man." Though this was a patent exaggeration, Pierce added much to the Universal horror cycle of the thirties.

So too did Karl Freund. The Czech-born cinematographer had been behind the camera on Fritz Lang's silent science fiction epic *Metropolis* (1926) and on Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931). *The Mummy* was his first effort as a director, and on the strength of this one wonders what sort of film *Dracula* might have been if Freund had been directing instead of merely photographing. *The Mummy* is a superbly restrained exercise in tension. From the scene in which the Mummy comes to life leaving Bramwell Fletcher a gibbering madman, when all we see of the creature is its bandages slithering across the floor in the wake of their master to the closing scene of Ardet

Bey being crushed beneath the toppled statue of Isis, Freund's watchword was *atmosphere*. And Freund layed on the atmosphere with a trowel. The effect was not so much an out-and-out horror picture, but more a symphony of pure unease. The only contemporary equivalent that springs readily to mind is Peter Weir's Australian effort *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, a film we will be discussing in a later chapter. The horror arises not so much from what you see on the screen but rather what you are afraid you are going to see. And that is what horror films should be all about. And at a time where horror film directors think that all they have to do to horrify their audiences is to show, in loving detail, a young girl's eye being put out by a maniac with a knife, I suppose *The Mummy* must look rather tame. But for my money, you can keep *Friday The Thirteenth* (parts 1 through 37!) and give me a screening of *The Mummy* any time.

While on the subject of graphic horror, let's deal with Tod Browning's *Freaks*, a film which caused something of a furore when first released in 1932 and banned by the British censor for decades. The story, briefly, involves the misadventures of a trapeze artiste (Olga Barclanova) who marries sideshow midget Harry Earles for his money then tries to poison him. His fellow freaks are not fooled for a minute and hunt down the villainess and transform her (mercifully, off-camera) into a bizarre half-hen — half-woman creature. How they achieve this miracle of bio-engineering is

never explained. It's enough to know that she pays the price for her treachery. What the British censor objected to, rather than the overt grue (of which there is little), was the use of real freaks for the making of the film. And it was this, more than anything, which gave the film its dubious reputation. In truth, Browning's handling of the material is very sensitive. It is the freaks that emerge as the real human beings and the "normal" characters who come over as monsters. In this respect, to fully appreciate the subtleties of the picture, it is necessary to see it twice. The first run through has its audience tense, ready to brave the shocks which never come. Only on the second viewing can one begin to grasp the warmth and humanity of the tragic creatures who have to eak out a living as side-show attractions.

Freaks had been made under the supervision of Irving Thalberg, the boy wonder of the MGM lot. Later in that same year, he borrowed Boris Karloff from Universal and set to work on a different type of horror picture. *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (1932). In retrospect, the film seems to be nothing more than a very up-market version of the serials being churned out by Universal and Republic, concerning as it does, a bid for world domination by Sax Rohmer's splendid oriental anti-hero. But before ruling the world, Fu must first find the mask and sword of Ghengis Khan (deceased) so that the yellow hordes will obey his every whim. Karloff played the part with gusto, perpetrating all sorts of nastiness on Nayland Smith and his stalwart band of followers. At one point in the film, Fu was required to project a bolt of lightning from his fingertip. Director Charles Brabin called in Ken Strickfaden, the man behind all the electrical shenanigans on the *Frankenstein* pictures. Strickfaden rigged up a copper cable to run down the sleeve of Karloff's kimono. One end was attached to a fake metal finger-nail and the other was fed straight into the MGM power supply. It was at this point that Karloff bid the bewildered cast and crew good-day and went home. Ever the professional, Strickfaden stepped into Karloff's role, so as not to hold up shooting.

"The electrical wizard stepped into position and put his foot on a badly insulated arc-light cable. There was a tremendous flash and a noise like a sledge hammer felling an ox. Fuses blew all over the studio. Strickfaden flew six feet through the air and fell in an unconscious heap. Men have died for films by fire and falls. Now it

seemed one had perished by electrocution. Frantic artificial respiration brought him round. Examination disclosed no more than a badly blistered toe."

But what did Strickfaden have to say on the matter? "Boy, am I lucky!" Mr Karloff's comment is unrecorded.

The last real classic to emerge in 1932 was First National's *Dr X*, starring Lionel Atwill. First National had been formed in 1917 and had been taken over by Warner Brothers in 1929. But the label had been kept alive by Warner for certain types of product until the mid-thirties. One can only assume that *Dr X* was not the sort of film Warners wanted their name associated with and hence issued it under the First National banner. This was a strange decision, as Warner had assigned one of their better-known contract directors to helm the piece. Though Michael Curtiz's better films were to follow (*Casablanca* and *Mildred Pierce* to name but two), *Dr X* remains one of his finest early efforts. The film is rare enough that many readers won't have seen it, so I'll refrain from digging too deeply into the plot. Suffice it to say that the main thrust of the action involves the tracking down of a maniacal "Full moon strangler" and that most of suspicion falls firmly on Lionel Atwill's *Dr X*. The film was shot in two strip Technicolor, though it is now thought that this was for contractual rather than aesthetic reasons. Indeed when the film turned up on BBC Television several years ago it was aired in black and white. Despite Lee Tracy's wise-cracking reporter, or perhaps because of him, the film still displays a sufficient number of chills — effective chills — to rank among the classics. Most of the action takes place in Dr X's hill-top hideaway, which doubles for his laboratory. There are secret panels, clutching hands and a colourful gathering of suspects. The audience is kept guessing until the last minute. The climactic re-enactment of the murders, featuring an hysterical Fay Ray at stage centre, is a scene of nail-biting tension. And the whole story is enhanced by the backdrop of Anton Grot's splendid sets.

The following year, the same team would be re-united in another classic of the horror film, *Mystery of the Wax Museum*. Director Michael Curtiz (this time labouring under the Warner Bros label), stars Lionel Atwill and Fay Ray, art director Anton Grot and cinematographer Ray Ranahan. Not forgetting our old friend Technicolor. And it is this film that will kick off our next chapter. ■



Above: Boris Karloff as the evil Fu Manchu in *The Mask of Fu Manchu*.

The Thirties - Part Three



Above: That's actually Vincent Price under the bandages in a still from the sequel to *The Invisible Man*.

Michael Curtiz's early technicolor horror film, *Mystery of the Wax Museum* (1933) was something of a mystery itself until recently. The movie disappeared from the circuits shortly after the last war. The last public screening of the picture was at a festival held in London to mark the twentieth anniversary of talkies. Warner Brothers withdrew the print immediately afterwards and, in 1954 when the remake was released, the last surviving colour print of *Mystery of the Wax Museum* was destroyed. The film remained lost for the next twenty years. Warner Brothers were unable to unearth even a black and white copy for television sale. Then, in 1977, a good 35mm technicolor print was discovered in the private vault of Jack Warner. There was a scramble as film schools and institutes around the world offered to finance the preservation project. But when the film was shown, it proved to be so dated in style that the would-be financiers made their excuses and withdrew. It was left to Warner Brothers themselves to preserve the movie. They made a copy negative and several prints but as cheaply as possible, robbing the picture of the subtlety of its original technicolor. Subsequent TV showings of the film therefore have lacked the richness of the original print, with single colours tending to dominate for each entire reel.

Although set in the 1930s, *Mystery of the Wax Museum* comes across like a Victorian Grand Guignol whodunnit. But at the same time, Glenda Farrell's hard-boiled performance as the wisecracking reporter on the case keeps us from losing sight of the pre-war setting. Art director Anton Grot's sets, complete with distorted perspectives, give the production an almost surreal air. Fay Wray is the delectable victim, offered immortality by Lionel Atwill's insane waxworks proprietor. While Atwill is going about his business of running the wax museum and falling in love with Fay Wray, a blacked cloaked weirdie is stealing bodies from the local morgue. Coincidentally, Atwill's new wax dummies bear uncanny resemblances to recently deceased citizens. It shouldn't take an astute film fan to put two and two

together. Nevertheless, Fay Wray's classic unmasking of Atwill in the climactic laboratory scene, with its echoes of Lon Chaney and Mary Philbin in *Phantom of the Opera* (1926), still packs a punch.

The *Ghoul* (1933), directed in Britain by T. Hayes Hunter, was another film long thought to be lost. Every time its discovery was announced it invariably turned out to be the later and inferior *Mad Ghoul* (1943). Then in 1969, a tattered copy turned up in Eastern Europe. The film turned out to be better than everyone remembered in terms of production values, sets and atmosphere. Boris Karloff plays Professor Morlant, a partially unhinged dabbler in ancient Egyptology and the occult. Among his collection of Egyptian artifacts is an immensely valuable jewel called The Eternal Light. Morlant orders his servant, Laing (played by Ernest Thesiger), to have the jewel buried with him so that resurrection and eternal life will be his. Various relations and near-relations descend upon the house for the reading of the will, all after the jewel. Needless to say, the jewel is stolen from the crypt and Morlant returns to life to avenge the desecration of his final resting place and regain the Eternal Light. The jewel changes hands several times during the night with alarming rapidity, before it is back in the undead hands of Professor Morlant. Morlant returns with the jewel to his crypt and stands before a large statue of the Egyptian god Anubis. He carves sacrificial symbols in his chest with a knife and, after seeing the statue come to life to accept the gift, dies for a second time.

Through weak direction, the film totters near to comedy at times. Ernest Thesiger as the servant is as polished as ever but seems to lack a rudder. Only Karloff's monster-with-a-heart performance holds the picture together.

One of the strangest of the 1930s horror films was James Whale's adaptation of H. G. Wells' *The Invisible Man* (1933). You didn't see the title star until the final seconds of the film. No stills showing the face of Rains were issued and the picture was laden with Whale's unrestrained comic touches. The comedy was at its most outrageous with the line



Left and below:
Karloff as The
deranged Professor in
The Ghoul. Below
left and below right:
Two scenes from the
James Whale Invisible
Man which starred
Claude Rains.



from Rains as he takes off his trousers to achieve complete invisibility — "I'll give them a shock they'll never forget!"

Despite the comedic script, the film still holds the attention through the bravura special effects of John Fulton — though in interviews Whale gave the impression that he performed the tricks.

"Much of the trick work depended on the old principle used by stage conjurors," said Whale, "the fact that if a man completely covered in a black suit stands in front of a dead black background, then he is invisible to the audience. A development of this method which we devised was a kind of facial makeup which, when photographed under special lighting, blended with the background and thus became invisible. We also made use of the system by which a background can be printed onto a picture, and thus we were able to give the appearance of being able to see the background through the place where, actually, Claude Rains was standing. In many cases retouching on the film had to be employed. Men with tiny brushes worked through microscopes, adding

touched to every single picture in the thousands of feet of film, and eliminating details which even the cameraman had not been able to overcome. This work cost hundreds of pounds, and demanded such close application that the men could not work at it for more than about two hours at a time."

Dazzling though the special effects were, it was Rains who emerged as the star of the show. His career took off in a big way and he carved a reputation for himself as a highly competent character actor, landing roles in such big budget productions as *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), *Casablanca* (1942) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946).

Of all the classic horror films of the 1930s, *King Kong* (1933) certainly had the biggest star. Producer/co-director Merian Cooper freely admitted that he had dreamed up the story more to please himself than the audiences. He imported British thriller writer Edgar Wallace to produce the script, but unfortunately Wallace contracted pneumonia and died before reaching his typewriter. The fact that Wallace still has a screen credit on ▶



the film tends to suggest that Cooper was more concerned with attaching Wallace's (famous) name to the production rather than with any script that the writer might have produced. Incredibly, Cooper had planned to use a real gorilla for the title role, but finally decided that the stop motion animation effects of Willis O'Brien would probably work out cheaper in the long run.

The movie is a tour-de-force of pacing. Although it isn't until about halfway through that we first get a look at Kong, there's never a dull second. If anything, the delay that precedes the arrival of the giant ape only serves to enhance the shock of his initial appearance.

Briefly, the story concerns the adventures of a film crew on their way to shoot an adventure picture. Leader of the expedition Carl Denham (Bruce Cabot) plans to shoot footage of the native legend "Kong", a creature which is kept behind a thirty foot wall on Skull Island. On their arrival, the members of the crew rush ashore and begin to film a native ceremony without permission. This, quite understandably, upsets the native witch doctor (and probably the native copyright lawyer too). He claps eyes on Ann Darrow (Fay Wray) and feels she'd make a neat sacrifice for Kong. But Denham has Ann signed to a contract and, aware that discretion is the better part of valour, beats a hasty retreat, with Ann and the rest of the crew, back to his ship. But the witch doctor is a determined man. That night, Ann is kidnapped and dragged back to Skull Island. The natives truss her to a bizarre altar and the party begins.

Within minutes, Kong makes his debut. He picks up Ann and takes her back into the jungle. It's about this time that Denham appears on the scene with a few of the lads from the film crew. He and a small party decide to follow Kong in the hope of getting Ann back. Eventually Ann is rescued, and Kong is rendered unconscious and brought to New York for exhibition. Naturally he escapes and, with Ann in one hairy hand, he scales the Empire State Building. The rest is history.

Most of the glory for *King Kong* has to go to effects wizard Willis O'Brien. He managed to imbue Kong with a real personality, which made the film much more than just another monster picture. His methods were kept secret during the making of the picture to prevent another studio making a quickie cash-in.

King Kong has been weakened by certain censor cuts, demanded in 1933 and never rescinded since. Excised were the scenes of Kong's rampage through the native village in which he dispatched several unlucky villagers in rapid succession. Arguably, this helped the film by reducing Kong's savagery and heightening audience sympathy. Cut was the infamous sequence in which Kong pulls Ann's clothes off. Not only was this a masterpiece of special effects, it also gave Kong an innocence and a curiosity which would have endeared him all the more to audiences. RKO also printed the film several points darker to minimise the blood in the monster fight sequences. It would have been understandable if they had darkened only these scenes, but why darken the whole picture? ■

This page: A selection of scenes from the classic monster movie, *King Kong*.





KING KONG

Directed by RAYMOND HAMILTON
Starring BRUCE CABOT
Produced by ERIC LAMMENHORN
Written by EDGAR WALLACE

The Thirties - Part Four

The *Black Cat* (1934) had absolutely nothing to do with Edgar Allan Poe, despite its title. The movie did have a lot to do with torture, necrophilia, murder and black magic. In fact, something for everyone. The picture was the first of the successful Karloff/Lugosi teamups. A pair of newly-weds and a certain Dr Verdegast (Bela Lugosi) find themselves stranded at the fortress abode of Hjalmar Poelzig (Boris Karloff). Poelzig tells Verdegast that during his absence Verdegast's wife and daughter have died. In reality, the daughter is alive and married to Poelzig. One of the young newly-weds discovers this fact and soon is in fear for her life at the hands of Poelzig. Verdegast takes a hand and, to avenge his wife and daughter, captures Poelzig and proceeds to skin him alive. The young newly-weds manage to escape in the ensuing confusion and in a rousing finale, the house is incinerated.

In reality, the film is only a little longer than the above synopsis. At only 65 minutes it is technically a B movie, though the superior performances of Karloff and Lugosi elevate the film to classic status.

The inevitable, but trendsetting, sequel to *Frankenstein*, *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), reunited director James Whale with his lead players from the earlier film, Colin Clive and Boris Karloff, and added a treat in the form of Ernest Thesiger. The movie opens with a prologue in which Mary Shelley (Elsa Lanchester) recounts the continuing adventures of Frankenstein and his monster to her fascinated husband (Percy) and their guest Lord Byron. Of course, we all knew that the Monster didn't perish in the blazing windmill at the end of *Frankenstein*. The action really gets under way when Dr Praetorius (Ernest Thesiger), a former teacher of Frankenstein, turns up with a collection of bottled midgets. He has succeeded in manufacturing life but is having problems with the size. He suggests that he and Frankenstein work together to perfect the first experiment. Young Dr Frankenstein doesn't want to know. He had enough last time. But Praetorius and the monster have already met. And the monster came down firmly on Praetorius' side when the good doctor offers him a mate. Therefore,

in order to persuade young Frankenstein to lend a hand, Praetorius has the monster kidnap Frankenstein's fiancee. Praetorius and Frankenstein build a mate for the monster, but when she claps eyes on her husband-to-be she is genuinely overwhelmed. Poor old monster! He takes rejection very badly and begins to tear the place apart. Finally, when urged by Praetorius "don't touch that lever, you'll blow us all to atoms!" the monster does precisely that and the four lead characters are wiped out.

Bride is a studio bound picture in the style of the early German masterpieces. Indeed, so influenced was Whale by the German films that during the planning stages he envisaged Brigitte Helm (the robot in *Metropolis*) as The Bride of the Monster. The role was filled admirably by Elsa Lanchester, whom Whale had probably met while directing her husband, Charles Laughton, in *The Old Dark House* (1932). But it is Ernest Thesiger as the demented Dr Praetorius who gets all the juiciest lines, and his performance more than rises to the occasion.

The Werewolf of London (1935) barely qualifies as a classic. It is included here more because it featured the screen's first werewolf rather than for any aesthetic reasons. It is the hokey tale of a scientist, Dr Glendo (Henry Hull), who is savaged by a strange animal whilst on an expedition in Tibet. Returning to London he discovers that he has an alarming tendency to turn into a man-wolf at the full moon. He is finally shot down — with lead bullets — by the local police. None of the paraphernalia usually attached to the werewolf legend was apparent in this film. But more on that later.

A far more deserving film of the appellation "classic" was Tod Browning's *Mark of the Vampire* (1935). Even if it does have one drawback. Though laden with atmosphere and bravura performances, notably from Bela Lugosi and the two Lionel Barrymores and Atwill, the movie is a cop-out. The supernatural happenings of the film are explained away at the end as all being part of an elaborate hoax to capture a murderer. Now if you believe that, you'll believe anything. Perhaps in the years

Below: Peter Lorre starred (and stared!) in the horror classic *Mad Love*.





pre-*Dracula*, when the first film version of the story was released (Tod Browning's silent film of 1926 *London After Midnight*, which starred Lon Chaney), audiences would have accepted the trick ending. As it was the picture went down like a lead Zeppelin.

However, in all fairness to Browning, it has to be said that while the film cops out, it never cheats. All the apparent spookiness (changes of vampires to bats and so on) are always shown as related incidents by claimed witnesses. Even so, Browning's judgement of atmosphere is flawless. One wonders why Browning's *Dracula* could not sustain a similar atmosphere past the first third. Certainly, if any horror film were long overdue for (another)? television showing then *Mark of the Vampire* is it!

Another film high on atmosphere was the second horror film to be directed by Dracula cinematographer Karl Freund, *Mad Love* (1935). The film had Dr Frankenstein that was, Colin Clive, as Stephen Orlac, a concert pianist whose hands are destroyed in a train crash. Appealing for help to noted surgeon Dr Gogol (Peter Lorre in his first American film), Orlac receives the world's first hand transplant. But unknown to the mild-

mannered musician, these new hands once belonged to a notorious murderer. Soon, Orlac has trouble controlling his hands (him and a million other guys!). He finds that his piano playing has suffered, but this is made up for by a distressing accuracy with throwing knives. The movie is uncompromising horror for its entire length with little if any humour to lighten the proceedings. The most notable funny line is an in-joke for movie buffs only. "It went for a little walk", uttered when a wax figure comes to life, is a direct lift from Freund's first horror movie as a director — *The Mummy*.

The Raven (1935), directed by Louis Friedlander (aka Lew Landers), was the second Karloff/Lugosi showcase. This time out Karloff was the hero, Bateman an escaped convict, who asks villain Dr Vollin (Lugosi), to change his face so that he can make good his escape. He should have been suspicious when Lugosi agreed. When Karloff wakes up he finds that he has the face of a monster. Lugosi says he will reverse the operation if Karloff will undertake to run a few errands. Lugosi has fallen in love with a young lady. Her father ridiculed Lugosi's proposal of marriage, so Karloff is to bring the father and the girl to Lugosi so that he can have his revenge. Lugosi plans to

Above: The two principals of *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), one of the first sequels in history to be better than the original.



dispatch the father using several devices from the fertile imagination of Edgar Allan Poe. In the middle of Lugosi's revenge, the girl's fiance arrives. Karloff joins the ensuing fray and tosses Lugosi into the incredible shrinking room, there to be crushed to strawberry jam. In the confusion, the victims-to-be escape and, presumably, live happily ever after.

In Tod Browning's *The Devil Doll* (1936), Lionel Barrymore is a wrongly convicted financier who escapes Devil's Island with a fellow prisoner who is also a scientist. The scientist, Henry B. Walthall, has perfected a way of reducing living creatures twelvefold. Masquerading as an old lady doll seller, Barrymore reduces two of the three men who framed him to doll size. The third confesses and proves Barrymore's innocence. Satisfied, Barrymore heads for an offscreen suicide.

As Browning's penultimate film *The Devil Doll* was a stylish production. But as with all Browning movies it suffered from a strong beginning and a weak ending. Barrymore's performance was superb and was ably supported by Raffaella Ottiano as the scientist's demented partner.

Rowland V. Lee's 1939 movie, *Son of Frankenstein*, marked the last outing of Karloff as the monster. It also cast Basil Rathbone in the title role as Wolfgang Frankenstein. The son eagerly steps into his father's shoes as the urgings of gallows survivor, Ygor (Bela Lugosi). Ygor then takes command of the monster ("He does things for me") and forces it to murder the jurymen responsible for his conviction. His job finished, the monster is knocked into a convenient sulphur pit until *The Ghost of Frankenstein* three years later.





This spread, far left:
Henry Hull as *The Werewolf of London*.
Below left: Boris and
Else in *The Bride of Frankenstein*, Top:
Boris in The Black Cat. Above: *Boris and
Else in The Revenant*. Above:
Boris and Else in The Bride of Frankenstein.

What stands out in the memory about this particular addition to the Frankenstein series is the fabulous sets. However, the presence of Whale would have made this an altogether superior picture. Lee had neither the taste nor the subtlety to handle a horror picture in a stylish manner. Witness Lionel Atwill's classic portrayal of the one-armed chief of police describing the demise of one unfortunate casualty. "The cartwheel ran over his chest. The heart burst." Then he raises the sheet in order to give the grieving widow a good eyeful. Interestingly, the

film was planned as a technicolor project, but the idea was abandoned when Karloff's makeup failed to have the desired effect in colour.

The thirties horror films had a style all their own. Perhaps it was something to do with the legacy of the silents. Certainly the German silents in particular had an enormous influence on 1930s grand guignol. The horror pictures of the forties would take an altogether more modern approach. Glossier and more subtle in some ways, but somehow lacking the visual style of the earlier decade. ■

The Forties - Part One



Classics were thinner on the ground during the 1940s than they were in the previous decade. Certainly, the Val Lewton films dominated the 40s. Their stylistic understatement filled the gap left by the declining quality of the Universal offerings admirably.

A film that seems to be more fondly remembered today than it deserves was the Technicolor offering, *Dr Cyclops* (1940). Despite the plusses — the return of *Kong* producer Schoedsack to horror and the colour — *Dr Cyclops* invariably disappoints when seen today. The film is laden with a jolly musical score and garishly bright Technicolor photography, all of which tends to dissipate any atmosphere that might have accidentally built up. The special effects scenes involving the miniature people were barely adequate, making effects wizard Willis O'Brien conspicuous by his absence. The story has Albert Dekker as the demented Dr Thorkel testing his amazing radium-powered shrinking device on Janine Logan, Tom Coley, Charles Halton, et al., in the depths of the South American jungle. Despite the set-pieces of the little folk battling a cat and an alligator, all of which was missing from the earlier "little people" movie, *The Devil Doll*, Jack Arnold's *The Incredible Shrinking Man* would tackle the subject matter with far more flair seventeen years later.

Universal's *The Wolf Man* (1941) was a more important film altogether. The script, by Hollywood veteran Curt Siodmak, was singlehandedly responsible for establishing all those pieces of Werewolf legend that people today believe to be genuine Transylvanian mythology — the effects of silver, pentagrams on the hand of the werewolf and so on. The little rhyme spoken by heroine Gwen (Evelyn Ankers) to hero Larry Talbot (Lon Chaney Jr), "Even a man who is pure of heart, and says his prayers by night, may become a wolf when the wolfsbane blooms and the moon is full and bright" is just so much Hollywood hokum.

The plot is fairly straightforward. Larry returns to Talbot Castle after a

death in the family to give comfort and support to his father (Claude Rains). While he is staying at the castle he meets and befriends Gwen. He, Gwen and her friend Jenny are casually strolling through the forest one night when they chance across a band of gypsies led by Maria Ouspenska and Bela Lugosi. Bela scares the daylights out of Jenny with his predictions of Doom and Disaster and Jenny rushes off into the forest (smart girl, heh?) She is attacked and mauled by a wolf. Her screams bring Larry to the scene and he wades in an attempt to save the girl's life. He manages to clout the mad beast with his walking cane, which just happens to have a silver top. The wolf falls to the ground dead. Then a strange thing happens. When Larry glances down to survey his handiwork, he finds not the body of a wolf, but the corpse of Bela Lugosi, the gypsy. Then Larry realises that he has been bitten by the wolf during the course of the battle. In the days that follow, Larry is troubled by weird dreams and finally, at the rise of the next full moon, he is transformed into the werewolf. He is finally despatched by his father, who wields the silver topped cane like a pro, while Larry is attempting to choke Gwen to death in the forest. His father stands by dumbly as the body of the Wolf Man turns back to the form of Larry.

The transformation scenes were handled by a kind of stop-motion process. The makeup man Jack Pierce would apply a portion of his Wolf Man makeup to Lon Chaney's face. The cameras would roll for a few frames. Then Pierce would add a little more makeup and the camera would capture another few seconds of film and so on until, by a series of dissolves, Chaney would appear to change into the Wolf Man in one smooth transition.

It is interesting that although *The Wolf Man* was not the first werewolf picture, it was the film that would influence all the werewolf movies that were to follow.

It was in 1942 that the first of the great Val Lewton horror films was released. *The Cat People* was handed to producer Lewton who was told to come up with a



This spread: A selection of stills from *Dr Cyclops*, which starred Albert Dekker as a crazy professor who shrinks his unfortunate victims to doll size.



film built around the title. It seems likely that RKO executives had watched with interest the strong performance of *The Wolf Man* at the box-office and felt that a similarly titled film might do just as well. What the executives were not prepared for was a tale of subtle terror in which the real horror was fear of the unseen.

The Cat People is a tale of sexual repression and brooding atmosphere. Oliver Reed (played by Kent Smith — they changed the character name in the Paul Schrader remake!) meets and marries Irena Dubrovna (Simone Simon)

despite her warning that if she . . . ah . . . "lies" with a man she will turn into a rather irate panther and tear the man limb from limb. Nevertheless, the marriage is never consummated and Oliver sends his wife to a psychiatrist in an attempt to sort out her hang-ups. While the shrink treats and falls in love with Irena, Oliver begins to see rather too much of co-worker Alice (Jane Randolph). Pretty soon, Alice feels she is being stalked by a large panther. The best sequences in the movie are when Alice is followed through the park and



Above: Lon Chaney Jr. in *The Wolf Man*.

Above right: Lon Chaney Jr. and Bela Lugosi and mystery

damsel in distress

In *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (which he didn't). Below right: A scene from

The Cat People, directed by Jacques Tourneur and starring Simone Simon.

the later scene in which she is "hunted" in a darkened swimming pool.

Meanwhile, things go badly for the psychiatrist when he tries to seduce Irena. His patient turns on him in a whirlwind of shadows and snarls. Irena finally meets her death after a hair-raising sequence in Reed's office when he and Alice are stalked by the unseen panther.

Lewton and his director Jacques Tourneur worked on the premise that nothing the audience can possibly see on the screen could be as frightening as what the imagination can produce.

Consequently, all we ever see of Irena's cat form is a series of shadows on walls, except for one scene. RKO executives insisted on showing Irena as a large Leopard in one sequence, a move that Lewton fought against, but lost.

The Cat People dealt with rather advanced subject matter for a 1940s film. The plot actually hinged on Irena's irrational fear of sex. Her marriage remained unconsummated. Oliver's frustration was manifested in his almost subliminal attraction to Alice.

Paul Schrader's remake tackles the plot of the original with far less subtlety, substituting over-the-top sexual action for Tourneur's suggestive shadows, and emerges with a horrific sex film rather than a sexual horror film.





Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man (1943) was the Universal picture that put Bela Lugosi in Karloff's boots as The Frankenstein Monster. Twelve years earlier Lugosi had turned down the very same role, stating a dislike for heavy makeup and the absence of dialogue. *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* was actually more a sequel to *The Wolf Man* than it was to any of the *Frankenstein* series. The monster was played by Lugosi as a sightless creature, an idea that was actually in the screenplay. But when studio heads saw the completed footage, they disliked the idea of a blind monster and recut the film to eliminate his aspect of the story. This explains the strange way in which Lugosi handled his portrayal, with the monster crashing around clumsily and tripping over objects a lot.

The plot is more simple-minded than simple. Larry Talbot (Lon Chaney Jr.) is rather fed up with being a werewolf, having miraculously survived a fractured skull in the previous film. He sets out to find Dr Frankenstein, who he believes can cure him. He doesn't find the good doctor (perhaps it should have been called *Frankenstein Nearly Meets the Wolf Man*) but a local crackpot has the bright idea of draining Talbot's lycanthropic energy into the



Top: Lon Chaney Jr. in 'The Wolf Man'. Above: Bela Lugosi played The Monster as if he were blind in 'Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man'. Unfortunately, studio heads decided to change the idea and restore the Monster's sight half way through the film, making nonsense of Lugosi's portrayal.



Frankenstein Monster, which he just conveniently happens to have. Problems occur when Talbot gets hairy and the monster revives. The two engage in a duel to the death, cut short when the ubiquitous irate villagers blow up a dam to wash their troubles away. Truth to tell, the film is interesting only as the first of the Universal Monster team-ups.

The catchily-titled *I Walked With A Zombie* (1943) was the second of the classic Val Lewton series of horror films. It is thought by many critics to be a horror version of Jane Eyre, though this critic would counter that the plot of *I Walked With A Zombie* is actually a little more coherent. A nurse, Betsy (Frances Dee), travels to the Caribbean to look after the wife, Jessica (Christine Gordon), of a wealthy plantation owner, Holland (Tom Conway). She falls in love with Holland but allows herself to be courted by his half-brother Wesley Rand (James Ellison). Betsy thinks that a trip to the local Voodoo ceremony might do Jessica good. But it turns out that the reason Jessica is a loony in the first place is that she tried to run away with Wesley, an idea that didn't appeal to Holland's mum (Edith Barrett). So she had her daughter-in-law zombified (with me so far?). Wesley finds out all about this and

tries to kill Jessica to free her from her living death. The most memorable sequence in the film is the nightmarish walk through the sugar cane fields when Betsy tries to take Jessica to the Voodoo ceremony. The director makes the most of light streaming through the cane and casting weird shadows. The rest of the film is taken up by characters looking out of windows through venetian blinds. Certainly a feast for shadow fans.

Hot on the heels of *I Walked With A Zombie* was Lewton's *The Curse of the Cat People* (1944). Handing over the directorial reins to former editor Robert Wise, Lewton crafted a film that contains neither curses nor Cat People. The movie carried over some of the cast and characters of the first film, Oliver Reed (Kent Smith) returned as the father of a little girl, worried about her insistence that she is visited by the spirit of her father's first wife, Irena. The daughter, Amy (Ann Carter), spends a lot of time with a slightly batty retired actress, Julia Farren (Jill Dean), who tells her ghost stories. The rest of the film is so confusing as to defy description here. Though Wise managed to maintain the level of atmosphere that pervaded the original picture, *Curse of the Cat People* is an altogether less dark movie. ■

Below: Lon Chaney Jr as The Wolf Man.
Above right: Lugosi and Chaney come to blows in Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man.
Opposite: The ad art for The Cat People.



CURSED

with the dread of
changing into a
FANG and CLAW

KILLER

Beautiful, warm, glamorous by day, she dared not love — for her kisses might change to snarls, her embraces to the death grips of the awful "Cat People" who stalk and strike by night! . . . THE STRANGEST STORY YOU EVER TRIED TO GET OUT OF YOUR DREAMS!

CAT PEOPLE

WITH
SIMONE SIMON
KENT SMITH
TOM CONWAY
JANE RANDOLPH
JACK HOLT

PRODUCED BY VAL LEWTON
DIRECTED BY JACQUES TOURNEUR
Written by DeWitt Bodeen

DON'T BE SURPRISED AT
ANYTHING
YOU SEE



The Forties - Part Two



Above: Claude Rains
as The Phantom in
the Universal remake
of *The Phantom of
the Opera*.

The *Phantom of the Opera* (1944) was Universal's weaker re-make of their own earlier success. This time out, director Arthur Lubin stood in for Rupert Julian and Claude Rains essayed Lon Chaney Senior's role. Susanna Foster, as the object of the Phantom's unwanted attentions, spent more time singing than screaming (though unkind critics might claim the two actions to be indistinguishable). Crooner Nelson Eddy made an unlikely hero figure. Despite the use of Technicolor (the original had been shown in tinted versions), the remake was an altogether less powerful telling of the story.

Based on a far more chilling concept was the premise of Lewis Allen's 1944 classic, *The Uninvited*. The set-up is simplicity itself. A brother and a sister buy an old mansion in Cornwall. They are warned by a young girl that her mother died in the house and that her spirit still walks the darkened corridors at night. From here on, the film's story — possibly the first straight ghost story of the cinema — laid the ground rules for the cinematic phantoms that would follow: *The Innocents*, *The Haunting* and *The Legend of Hell House*.

Ray Milland's lead character seems to have just stepped out of a romantic comedy and if anything was too much in charge of the plot. His command of the situation alleviates our fears accordingly. For all its excellence the movie is also presented in a very stagey fashion. The final appearance of the ghost seems to be almost an afterthought to diminish this theatrical feel. This was an error in judgement on the part of the makers of the film. *The Haunting* never showed its spook and was all the more effective for that.

But whatever its drawbacks, *The Uninvited* set a trend and set it well. And that is as close to the perfect definition of "Classic" as you can get.

The *Bodysnatcher* saw the return of *Curse of the Cat People* director Robert Wise to the horror genre and to the Lewton school of moviemaking. Boris Karloff too returned to horror in his first Lewton movie. Karloff plays Gray, a sup-

plier of corpses to Dr McFarlane (Henry Daniell), who conceals his nocturnal activities by posing as a cab driver. When available bodies get thin on (in?) the ground, Gray decides that he can just as easily manufacture his own. McFarlane's servant, Joseph (Bela Lugosi) finds out about Gray's methods and tries to blackmail Gray. This is his first mistake. Obviously he doesn't know that it is certain death to blackmail a murderer. Gray kills Joseph and delivers his body to the doctor. The delivery sequence was heavily cut for British release. Gray drives Joseph's body to the doctor in his cab, the corpse sitting next to him. With the motion of the cab, Joseph's body lurches around like a living thing, apparently trying to snatch the reins from Gray's grasp. This scene was thought too harrowing for British audiences. The doctor decides that Gray is too dangerous a servant, so he kills him and disposes of the body by dissecting it. Later, searching for another body with which to continue his work, McFarlane digs up the body of a woman, imagining it to be Gray, the doctor becomes hysterical and drives his carriage off a cliff.

Unlike the later *Isle of the Dead*, *The Bodysnatcher* is a harrowing roller-coaster ride through a brooding, sombre 18th century world. Karloff gives one of his best performances and went on to make another film with the Lewton team, as well as *Isle of the Dead* — *Bedlam* (1946).

Isle of the Dead (1946) was Karloff's second outing with the Lewton boys. The picture was directed by *Citizen Kane* and long-time editor Mark Robson. The short running time of 75 minutes unfolded the tale of General Pherides' (Boris Karloff) visit to the grave of his wife, on an island cemetery. He is accompanied by newspaperman Oliver Davies (Marc Kramer). They find the grave defiled and stay to investigate with the inhabitants of the island. But they have carried the plague with them from the mainland. One by one the islanders succumb to the disease. One old biddy believes an attractive young

serving girl to be a vampire and to be responsible for the deaths rather than the plague. An islander (Katherine Emery) falls into a cataleptic trance and is buried. Confusion piles upon confusion as the "dead" woman rises from her grave and wanders the island, enforcing the theory that the serving girl, Thea, is a vampire. Crazy with the plague, Pherides tries to kill Thea, but is himself killed in the nick of time by the cataleptic, who then falls to her death from a cliff. All that in one hour fifteen minutes.

There were problems during the shooting of the picture. At one point Karloff was hospitalised through an old back injury and actress Rose Hobart was replaced by Katherine Emery as the cataleptic. For all the plot detail, the

film is actually a leisurely stroll through horror country. At no time does the action become intense. The audience fear is maintained by anticipation of action. And as with all Lewton films, atmosphere is everything.

Dead of Night (1946) was something of an unusual picture in that it was the first horror picture to be comprised of several different stories. The five horror tales were held together with a strong narrative thread, a linking story in which Mervyn Johns as architect Walter Craig visits Pilgrim's Farm at the request of a client he has never met, Eliot Foley (Roland Culver). He experiences intense *deja vu* as he arrives at the farm. Then he remembers that he has been there before — in a dream. He tries to leave but is dissuaded by psych-

This page: The original Phantom as portrayed by Lon Chaney Sr and two scenes from the later remake.





Above: Boris Karloff
In the Val Lewton
masterpiece *Isle of the
Dead*. Bottom row,
left to right: The
poster art for *Isle of
the Dread*, a scene
from *Dead of Night*,
and a portrait of
Mervyn Johns from
the same film.

hiatrist Dr Van Straaten (Frederick Valk), who suggests that he listens to the stories of the other guests. Unfortunately, space does not allow individual examination of each of the five stories. Nevertheless, the tales were all excellent and ably acted by a fine cast of British actors.

In the first film to team Florey and Lorre, *The Face Behind the Mask* (1941), Peter Lorre plays Janos — scarred in a fire and doomed to wear a mask to hide his hideous features. But in 1947, Robert Florey directed his Lorre in the tale of a man haunted by the disembodied hand of a concert pianist and driven to madness. *The Beast with Five Fingers* followed the breakdown of Lorre as the hand tries to reveal the murderer of its former owner, though Lorre is the only one to see the hand. At the studio's insistence, the entire episode is explained away in the final reel as being totally a product of Lorre's warped imagination. Nevertheless, Lorre gives a flawless performance and the effects scenes, courtesy of William McGann and Henry Koencamp, with the scuttling, piano-playing hand are fabulous.



SHE ISN'T DEAD yet she's BURIED ALIVE!

Boris KARLOFF

ISLE OF the DEAD

APPALING! WEIRD! BAFFLING!

What evil force is loose that empties graves of those long dead... buries them still alive... leaves behind it Death—AND WORSE?

ELLEN DREW • MARC CRAMER

Produced by VAL LEWTON • Directed by MARK ROBSON

Written by Robert Coote and Louis Untermeyer

*Far right: Peter Lorre
in a tight spot in The
Beast with Five
Fingers. Left: Karloff
as The Body
Snatcher.*



The Fifties



One of the most talked about movies of all time, *The Thing From Another World*, (1951) was a totally different concept in horror films, a new approach for a new era. It was constructed in the format of producer Howard Hawks' earlier armed forces dramas like *The Dawn Patrol* (1936), *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939), *Air Force* (1942) and so on, the chief points of similarity being the Air Force and the strong male cameraderie. Except this time, the valiant flyers were facing a different type of enemy. An enemy from beyond space. Armed with only their overlapping dialogue, the airmen, led by Kenneth Tobey, attempt to destroy the invading plant man from the stars. The build-up to the final battle is a tour-de-force of pacing and noir atmosphere. The Thing is never clearly seen, hinting at some of the films that would follow and echoing the earlier days of Val Lewton.

It has been said that Hawks directed the film himself. This seems unlikely and both Nyoy and Hawks have always denied it. As much like a Hawks' directed film as this is, remember that all the Lewton films had a consistency of style, despite the varying directors. Too many scholars attach exaggerated

importance to the contribution of the director. This is perhaps due to the unflagging efforts of Francois Truffaut — among others of the *Cahiers du Cinema* magazine of the fifties — to boost the role of the director. In fact, often the director will contribute no more to a movie than the producer (who hired him), the writer, the editor or the lighting cameraman. Hawks had a hand in all of these roles at various times in his career and his presence is felt very strongly in *The Thing*.

Everything else that can possibly be said about *The Thing* has already been said elsewhere, though, at the risk of repetition I will add that it is probably the greatest contemporary horror film of all.

It the Terror from Beyond Space (1958) was a surprisingly effective low budget shocker, which emerged in the wake of *The Thing* and is said to have inspired 1978's *Alien*. The plot tells of a murderous creature which stows away on an earth spacecraft. Once in space, the creature gets peckish and decides to raid the refrigerator, but is diverted by tastier fare — the crew. Trying to lock the creature behind steel bulkheads is a pointless exercise — it just pushes its way through. How do the



crew cope with this ticklish problem? If they do! Oh, they flush it out an airlock... just like the heroes planned to do in *Alien*. "It", incidentally was Ray "Crash" Corrigan, who also starred in the chapterplay serial *The Undersea Kingdom*.

The Creature from the Black Lagoon (1954) was arguably director Jack Arnold's finest film. The movie pilfers more than a little from *King Kong* with an expedition into the South American jungle to find a fabulous creature. The Gillman falls for Julia Adams' lady explorer in a tip of the hat to Kong's doomed affair with Fay Wray.

The picture was filmed in 3D. The underwater sequences with Ricou Browning in the rubber suit paddling along silently beneath the swimming figure of Julia Adams, were packed with swirling nightmarish imagery. The whole sequence was a bizarre parody of the mating display, with the creature reflecting Julia Adam's motions in his own movements.

Much has been written about the career of Jack Arnold (notably in *Starburst*) and though *Creature from the Black Lagoon* qualifies as Arnold's best picture and therefore a classic, it would be unfair to leave *It Came from*

*This spread: A selection of scenes from the fifties classic horror picture *It: The Terror from Beyond Space*. This film may have been a factor in the inspiration for *Alien*.*



Outer Space (1953) and *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) unmentioned.

Curse of Frankenstein came as something of a shock in 1956. Produced by the British B movie company of Hammer Films, the picture was essentially a remake of the 1931 Universal *Frankenstein* (see page 18) — but with a difference. Whereas the original had concentrated on the concepts and consequences of Frankenstein's experiment, the Hammer version dwelt on the mechanics of the operation. Blood and disembodied limbs were in evidence. The later sequels would follow the exploits of the good doctor rather than those of his creation. Hammer's crisply lit and photographed version contrasted heavily with the shadowy efforts of twenty years earlier. Hammer also took the humour out of horror and played on their audience's adrenalin.

*Right: The poster artwork for the Jack Arnold classic *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*. The film was successful enough to spawn two sequels, though the last film in the series was nothing to do with Arnold, who felt he had squeezed all he could from the first two movies.*

They cast horror-superstars-to-be Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee as the Doctor and the creature respectively. Lee's makeup, designed by Phil Leakey, avoided the traditional flat-headed approach and instead went for the look of a three month old corpse. Cushing tackled his role without the hysterical theatrics of Colin Clive and instead presented a calm, serious scientist driven by strong curiosity and a casual disregard for human life.

The Curse of Frankenstein is not my idea of a classic. Terence Fisher's mechanical direction-by-numbers prevents that. Says Fisher of his approach to horror pictures: "I know it's fashionable and popular to say that the unseen is the most scaring; I don't believe this! I believe the seen to be the most scaring thing I can think of and the first moment of the Frankenstein monster coming to life was one of them — and that was just



*Left: When the monster finally did appear in *The Night of the Demon*, audiences had to admit they were getting their money's worth. Director Tourneur fought against the inclusion of the Demon but was overruled. In this case, perhaps that was the wise decision.*



a twitch of the hand." The film's gross takings of 7½ million dollars for an outlay of ¼ million would seem to indicate that Fisher was right. It would seem that the cinema-going public would rather stare at detached eyeballs than be jolted by Jacques Tourneur's slight of hand style. But it was a film that would shape a whole new generation of horror films and change the face of the genre for all time. Me, I'd rather have *The Cat People* any day.

Night of the Demon (1956) was something of an anachronism when it was first released. Belonging firmly to the Val Lewton 1940s style of horror movie, it was directed by *Cat People* helmer Jacques Tourneur. Nevertheless, the piece, a film version of the M.R. James short story "Casting the Runes" is high

on atmosphere and good solid jolts. The plot revolves around a black magician, Doctor Karswell (Maurice Denham) and an investigator John Holden (Dana Andrews). When Holden's snooping annoys the magician, Karswell "casts the runes", passing a slip of paper to Holden, assuring him of a grisly death at the talons of an unspeakable demon. The trick is to hand the runes back to their originator to escape the curse.

In keeping with the style of the earlier Val Lewton movies Tourneur was reluctant to show his monster. Studio insistence won out in the end and, though the demon is seen in the closing moments, it is such a humdinger that is difficult to find fault with the decision.

There are many magical moments in



Night of the Demon. There is just space to mention the chilling demonstration of Karswell's power when he causes a violent gale to spring up at an open air children's party and the way the audience jumps at the appearance of a hand on a set of bannisters. It is this and more that makes *Night of the Demon* one of the greats of the horror genre.

Before beginning work on the Frankenstein sequel for Hammer Terence Fisher found time to turn in a remake of the 1931 Universal *Dracula* movie. This Hammer film managed to be economical and a lot more stylish than *Curse*. It reunited Cushing and Lee, both of whom seemed more comfortable with

their roles here than in the earlier Hammer horror. The story follows the original fairly closely, while discarding the earlier film's staginess.

Dracula explored some interesting ideas, including that of Dracula's victims enjoying rather than fighting his fanged attentions, but its clean-cut, documentary style worked against any hope of capturing a genuine Gothic atmosphere.

Despite the positions of *Curse of Frankenstein* and *Dracula* as the best of the Hammer series, their output, ultimately, lacks the atmosphere and sheer visual style of the Universal and the Lewton movies. ■





The Sixties



This page: Recurring images in Hitchcock's two great horror films of the '60s, *The Birds* and *Psycho*, our feathered friends turn up with alarming regularity.



Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) represented another about face in the style of the horror genre. Taken from the same source material as the later *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Psycho* relates the adventures of Norman Bates, a boy who loves his mother. Janet Leigh is the earliest victim, shocking the viewer by appearing to be the heroine but having the sheer chutzpah to be killed off in the first half of the picture.

There may be just one or two readers who haven't seen the film so I won't dwell on the plot. But the movie does serve to confirm my suspicions that Hitchcock was a great technician rather than a great artist. *Psycho* borrows heavily from the Lewton school of movie making. Old Dark Houses, pickled corpses and tricksie direction. The whole motel sequence was lifted directly from Orson Welles' picture, *Touch of Evil* (1958) which also featured

This page: Two strong images from the grand-daddy of the current stalk and slash school of movie-making, Psycho.



Janet Leigh in trouble in a motel with a young Denis Weaver as the crazed night manager.

Brief mention should go to the obscure ghost movie, *The Innocents* (1961). It is an upmarket offering with technical credits to match. Scripted by Truman Capote, the movie was directed by Jack Clayton with photography by Freddie Francis. Deborah Kerr is the governess whose charges just *might* be possessed by evil spirits. Martin Stephens and Pamela Franklin are the menacing children and the film has been buried for years. Perhaps one of

the television networks will have the good sense to dust this picture off and screen it in the near future.

Also a ghost story was Robert Wise's ponderous and pretentious film, *The Haunting* (1963). The picture contains some of the best moments in horror films. These moments are probably a legacy from Wise's Lewton days. He concentrates on the unseen horrors, relying on the old concept that what the mind imagines is far more harrowing than what the screen can show. The cast — Richard Johnson, Julie Harris, Claire Bloom and Russ Tamblyn — are trapped





Above: Norman Bates and Marion Crane pass the time of night in Psycho. Above right: Hitchcock poses with two of the stars of his horror film *The Birds*. Right: Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) plans to head for the hills in Psycho.



in a perfunctory haunted house story. But it is the handling of the tale that elevates it to classic status.

Tomb of Ligea (1964) is absolutely the best of the Roger Corman Poe series. Vincent Price plays an obsessed wealthy man whose second wife (Elizabeth Shepherd) is haunted by the presence of his first wife. The film becomes a real puzzle as to who is the real lunatic: Ms Shepherd could be imagining the whole thing, Vincent Price might truly be obsessed with his first wife, Ligea. Or Ligea could be so crazy that she doesn't realise she's dead.

AIP, who underwrote the Corman Poe series, were the American equi-

valent to Hammer Films. But Corman's movies always managed to look a lot more expensive than they really were. Corman assembled a formidable array of talent for his pictures. Scripters like Robert Towne and Richard Matheson and cinematographers like Floyd Crosby, Nic Roeg and Hammer Photographer Arthur Grant. Roeg had been behind the camera on *Masque of the Red Death*, a close second to *Ligea*.

The Poe Corman pictures deserve an entire book to themselves. It seems almost criminal to dispense with such an important chapter in the genre in a few paragraphs. Certainly, all the Corman films are deserving of consideration here, but space does not



Left: The living fight off the dead in George Romero's nasty but enthralling movie *Night of the Living Dead*. Below: King of the low budget horror picture, Roger Carmen.

permit.

George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), made only a few years after the peak of the Poe Corman series, was a completely different style of film. Years ahead of its time, horror cinema is still to this day emulating the style of Romero's picture. The difference is that the imitators don't have Romero's sense of dramatic pacing. True, Romero shared a fault with the late Terence Fisher in that he avoids cutting away from explicit scenes of gore and cannibalism, but somehow the gruesome sequences seem to be grafted onto the film as an afterthought. Certainly, the images of the zombies chewing on victims' innards are gratui-

tous and unnecessary. The picture would have worked perfectly well without them. The best scares in the film come not from the living dead's culinary preferences but from the idea that they were once alive and somebody's relative or friend. Indeed, one of the most chilling moments is when a ten year old child rises from death and attacks her mother with a garden fork.

In this way, *Night of the Living Dead* is a loss of identity picture in the style of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, with the grue grafted on to please the crowds. The true genius of Romero is that he can serve up the kind of picture he wants to make disguised as the sort of film the public thinks it wants to see. ■



The Seventies



The 70s gave rise to no films that could rightly be called "classics" when compared to the fabulous offerings on show during the preceding four decades. Nevertheless, many fine horror movies were available to fans of the genre.

Hammer's *The Vampire Lovers* (1970) deserves mention for the way it skilfully combined horror with a kind of slinky lesbian sex image, serving up such a feast of blood and breasts that it was difficult to determine exactly what it was Hammer were trying to do. The sex laden trend continued through *Lust for a Vampire* (1971) and *Twins of Evil* (1971) both of which also had their roots firmly in the tradition begun by Sheridan Le Fanu's Carmilla stories. It was in these movies that Ingrid Pitt came to the fore as something of a horror heroine. Spending much of her screen time undraped, the lovely Miss Pitt perpetrated all kinds of indignities on the nubile starlets who also peopled the casts of these films.

The two Phibes movies, directed as a kind of parody of the horror genre by Robert Fuest, featured Vincent Price in the kind of role that is expected by his fans. *The Abominable Dr Phibes* (1971) and *Dr Phibes Rises again* (1972) depicted the insane antics of a crazed scientist trying to return life to the dead body (Caroline Munro) of his wife. All who stand in his way perish in a variety of grisly fashions. In the first movie, the deaths are patterned after the plagues visited upon the Egyptians via Moses in the Old Testament.

Vampire Circus (1972) was an interesting offering from Hammer, which had a travelling circus, the members of which were vampires, arrive in a small town to wreak vengeance on the mayor, who had been responsible for the earlier death of their vampiric master. The most interesting aspect of this film was that the vampires of the circus had the ability to turn from their human form to animals and back again, an intriguing variation of the vampire-to-bat



transformation.

Nicolas Roeg, who had been the man behind the camera for the Corman directed *Masque of the Red Death*, was the director of the 1973 offering *Don't Look Now*. The film was an enigmatic tale of a couple who travel to Venice following the accidental death of their young daughter. The father (Donald Sutherland) becomes obsessed with the belief that his daughter is still alive and befriends two strange old ladies who purport to be mediums. In the chilling climax of the movie, Sutherland spots a figure he takes to be his daughter and pursues it. Needless to say the figure is not that of his daughter, but something altogether more horrible. The film was a

beautifully photographed exercise in obscurity.

The *Wicker Man* (1973) is a small horror film with a very large reputation. Concerning the survival of the pagan ritualistic religions of pre-Christian times, the movie is full of fertility rites and human sacrifice. Set in modern times, the action begins with the arrival on a remote island of a policeman (Edward Woodward). The natives, led by Lord Summerisle (Christopher Lee) are suspicious of the stranger, and, when he tries to interfere in their way of life, they turn on him and he finds himself featured attraction in one of their pagan ceremonies.

The *Legend of Hell House* (1973) was

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a diluted film version of Richard Matheson's rollercoaster novel. A film in the style of *The Haunting*, *Legend of Hell House* tells the tale of a group of psychic investigators who spend a time in a reputedly haunted house with tragic results. The cast included Roddy McDowall and Pamela Franklin (who had been seen in the earlier ghost story *The Innocents*) and Michael Gough as a preserved corpse!

William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973) is a horror movie with a bigger reputation than it truly deserves. The superficially terrifying movie really had very little to recommend it once the surface veneer of terror had been stripped away. Certainly Linda Blair's career has never recovered from the experience.

A more entertaining picture (and funnier) was Mel Brooks' *Young Frankenstein*. The film cast Gene Wilder in the Basil Rathbone role of a descendant of the original Frankenstein who returns to Transylvania to take possession of Castle Frankenstein. The incidents depicted manage to include just about every set piece a fan can remember about the Universal *Frankenstein* movies, from the Monster's meeting with the Blind Hermit (ably portrayed by O.P. Heggie in *Bride of Frankenstein* and essayed by Gene Hackman in the Brooks version) to the encounter with the Chief of Police whose wooden arm has a life of its own (Lionel Atwill played the part in *Son of Frankenstein*, Kenneth Mars did it better in *Young Frankenstein*).



The Texas Chainsaw Massacre was based on true incidents of murder and cannibalism in Texas in the 1950s. Director Tobe Hooper took these elements and forged them into a grueling thriller which though relatively bloodless, is directed with such skill that the viewer will sweat that he has seen all sorts of atrocities performed on screen before his very eyes. The secret of *Texas Chainsaw* is in its pacing. The anticipation of violence takes up a great deal more of the running time than does the actual depiction of death and dismemberment. It is enough to know what the crazed villain Leatherface is going to do with Marylin Burns when he catches her without seeing it. The other quality that makes *Texas Chainsaw* such a compelling film

is the way in which the tone of the movie changes after the heroine is captured for the first time. The plot turns away from being a straightforward body-count horror film into a kind of absurdist black comedy. The idea of the father of the lunatic family being too old and frail to be able to hit the heroine over the head with a hammer becomes almost hysterically laughable. Hooper only gets away with this because the first half of the film is such a grim shocker. The audience is attuned to expect nastiness and the onslaught of crazier and crazier situations is easier to accept. But the nervous laughter is always there.

Stephen Spielberg's *Jaws* is on the surface of it, more a thriller than a horror film. But the obvious parallels with such

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movies as *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* and all the giant insect pictures of the fifties make it more a monster movie than anything else. The film is perhaps more effective for keeping the monster within the boundaries of accepted fact. The giant shark which preys upon a small seaside town is more acceptable to a general audience than large ants or king-sized spiders. And, being all the more real for that, the film becomes even more frightening for its plausibility.

Alien brought the horror pictures of the last three decades the full circle. Owing more than a little to *The Thing* and *It the Terror from Beyond Space*, *Alien* is a startlingly unusual blend of cinematic styles. The first version of the script was written by Dan O'Bannon, a long time fan of the films of the fifties. The script was re-written by Walter Hill, the director of the earlier movie, *The Warriors*. Hill brought a tough grittiness to *Alien*. Full of tough talk and overlapping dialogue, this version scanned like Howard Hawks — only more so. By the time director Ridley Scott got to work on the film, it had taken on another slightly different form. Scott's superbly atmospheric photography and underplayed performances gave *Alien* the feel of what we might have expected of Val Lewton if he had ever made a space picture.

The nightmarish designs of H.R. Giger, who worked on all the alien forms and the interiors of the Space Jockey wreck, added to the overall visual feel of the film.

Alien is one of those horror films that stands up well to repeated viewings. In this respect, it could justly be called the best of the 1970s horror offerings. And I doubt that few would argue with that. ■





£2.50